Social Status of the Moaga Woman and Work Assigned to Her

562 The Moaga woman is regarded as a veritable beast of burden. Household duties and the weaving of cotton for her own and her husband's clothes are not her only occupations. [183] She helps her husband cultivate the family field, and she has her own plots for peanuts, beans, etc.

She endures wretched treatment and must always submit to her husband's whims. She enjoys no consideration whatever and is never called upon to give an opinion. The husband alone rules the home.

[842] If she is so unfortunate as to have no children, she is regarded with scorn. She carries the loads when a move is in progress. A [483] basket and a pyramid of gourds containing her effects and those of her husband are balanced on her head, while the husband canters beside her on a horse or takes his ease on a donkey. If he is afoot, he carries only his quiver, his arrows, his bow, and a club.

To be sure, the Moaga woman may express in unpleasant words her resentment of the maltreatment to which she is subjected, because the Mossi admit that she has no weapon other than her tongue. This is what is meant by the saying, "A woman's mouth is her quiver."

Conjugal Life

834 Interdictions and permissible acts. The couple is forbidden to have sexual relations at the following times.

834 853 1. For a period of not less than two years and a half after the birth of a child to safeguard the baby's life. Indeed, it is believed that each child comes into the world with its own supply of milk, and if another child were to be conceived during the nursing period, [184] the first would die because the milk of the newborn child would be fatal to him.

834 841 2. During the menstrual period. The reason for this prohibition that the husband's fetishes and charms lose part of their "power" after relations at this time.

834 843 3. A pregnant woman visits her husband during the first six or seven months. All relations then cease until some time after the delivery, as indicated above.

593 cases are rare. Less rare are the children who care little for their parents. Nevertheless, old people are usually treated well and with [888] great respect. A son who abandons his old father or mother is held in very poor esteem. A woman prefers to bear daughters who will help her in her daily work, but she hopes for one or two sons with whom she may live when she is old.

857 883 [482] 312 The girls live with their mother. As soon as they can walk, they follow her to the stream and return with a gourd of water on their heads. As they grow, so does the gourd, and little girls carry water jars weighing from fifteen to twenty kilograms. At home, young girls mill grain to feed the whole family, tend the fire, stir the sauce, wash the dishes and the clothes, sweep, in short, attend to all the household tasks under their mother's guidance. The only task of a woman with two or three half-grown daughters is to supervise their work. Because they are always with their mother, the young girls are usually more responsible and better behaved than the boys. Unfortunately they make up for this later, and more often than not, it is on their own initiative that they go at night to the young men's huts. A young man may give presents to a girl who has already been promised in marriage, and he may do so in front of her mother, who says nothing.

857 883 231 Boys help their father as soon as they are strong enough. Younger boys follow their older brothers into the bush as soon as they can and help them herd the sheep and goats. These boys go out every morning, before the sun has dried the dew, to look for new termite nests full of insects which the chicks are fond of eating. During the dry season, they cut down and plait grass to cover the roofs; if they are old enough, they even cut the firewood. When a little older, if their father or the person with whom they live owns a horse, they watch over it, take it to the stream to water it and to wash it, go into the bush to cut grass for it, and clean the stables. During the winter when the grass is green, each of the horses of a rich naba is cared for by three or four children. Some of them cut the grass, others /37/ stuff it almost by force into the horse's mouth, while one little boy drives the flies away with a stick to which a sort of flexible leather sole is attached. The winter season is a fine time for horses, who grow fat and heavy. Unfortunately, the Black does not think of the future and does not foresee how much dry grass will be needed to bridge the dry season; as a result, the horses suffer a great deal from hunger at that time.

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Above: Water Carriers.
Below: Youths Returning from the Bush with Bundles of Straw.

Above: Threshing Millet.
Below: Winnowing Millet. Millet Granaries in the Background.

2:Mangin--56a M-5 (ca. 1910) 1921 FA28 Mossi FA28

221 After a few hours when the millet has been sufficiently threshed,
241 the emptied and broken husks are swept to the side. The grain is
476 gathered in a heap, and a strong fellow tosses it into the air with a
788 wooden shovel to separate the chaff from the good grain, which is put in a heap. When all the grain has thus been winnowed, it is surrounded with a ring of ashes to protect it against evil spirits. Then one of the threshers, who is not a member of the family, puts some millet in a gourd and sprinkles it with water. He proceeds to throw it by the handful onto the millet pile, saying: "So-and-So fears rain," mentioning the name of the owner of the harvest and the name of every member of his family. He ends by saying: "When we are finished weeding, let the drought come. When we are finished planting, let the heavy rains come." If the owner of a horse is present, he receives a gourd of millet for his mount. Each of the elders also takes some for his chicken. If this ceremony is not carried out, the millet may not be used as seed the following year.

221 /49/ The women come with their baskets; a man takes one of the
351 brooms and sinks it into the millet heap in various places; then the
[382] men fill the baskets and help the women place them on their heads. At the house the millet is unloaded into granaries made of clay mixed with finely cut straw. These granaries have the shape of large jars 1.50 meters high; they usually rest on large stones, and they are
[343] smoked out beforehand to get rid of termites. They are closed with a lid of the same material and covered with a small thatch roof as a protection against rain, for they usually stand in the open air in the inner courtyard. Millet beer is brought and drunk on the spot while the millet is being winnowed. Sometimes the festivities end with dancing, and then everyone goes home, to begin again another day. The month of January goes by in this fashion.

221 February, March, and April are vacation months, months for hunting and fishing.

224 Actually no Mossi is a hunter, yet all Mossi are hunters to some
411 degree. Since the French occupation, men armed with very primitive flint guns are sometimes seen on the fringes of the heavy bush which borders the Volta and contains large game. These flint guns are so crude that they frequently burst and wound the man who recklessly
224 loaded it with too much powder. These natives know the bush thoroughly and are very helpful to the adventurers who wish to hunt koba, buffalo, elephant, leopard, or even lion, although the latter is to the

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Above: Inside a Soukala. Above: The Occupants of a Soukala.
Middle: Load-bearers. Middle: Weaver.
Below: Marketplace.

439 from the south, bracelets, and fabric strips, and they import salt and hoes. Often they take only money with them and return with salt bars which sell on the market for one to one and a half, sometimes even two francs, a kilogram. Around Fada N'Gourma (Binge /sic/ to the natives), Say, and Niamey, Karite butter, locust bean flour, and especially kalro pellets are exported, while onions, garlic, and sometimes horses are imported. There is no trade with Dahomey.

484 The natives travel in short stages of 20, 25, or at most 30 kilometers a day. They set out at dawn or whenever the moon sheds sufficient light and stop when the sun becomes too hot. They set out again when the sun dips on the horizon and stop in time to prepare a meal if their wives accompany them, which is rare, or to buy something to eat if they are alone. They spend the night with a friend if [574] they /63/ have one in the locality and lengthen or shorten their day's march if they expect to find an acquaintance in a certain village. The livestock feed as they walk, and donkeys carry the exchange goods and especially the kola nuts on the way back.

482 Nearly all travellers bear part of their load on their head. Since we have come to mention this, let us again quote Delafosse: "Portage has been much slandered in France these past few years. It has been cited as a barbarous custom, a form of slavery which we had supposedly introduced in Africa and imposed on the unfortunate Negroes. This merely proves that the French people like to discuss things of which they know little. The very first geographers and travellers who spoke of the Sudanic Negroes—Herodotus among the Greeks, El Bekri among the Arabs—said that beyond the Sahara, where horses and camels cannot stand the climate, the natives themselves carried burdens on their heads over very long distances." (6) These remarks

6. Delafosse, Le peuple Siéna/ The Siena People/, p. 53.

are strictly true. Abuses on our part lie in forcing the pace and making the natives run with their loads in the hot sun or in exceeding the regulation weight. If reasonable limits are observed, the Blacks accustomed from infancy to the bearing of heavy burdens on their heads—in their country, everything is carried in this fashion—are no more to be pitied than our soldiers burdened on long marches with

482 their pack, their full cartridge pouches, and their gun. This is proved by the fact that it is very easy to find volunteer porters nowadays who [465] agree to carry a box weighing 25 or 30 kilograms for 200 or 400 kilometers, or even farther, for half a franc a day.

[492] The fabrics are coiled into huge rolls which hang on either side of the ox or donkey, or, when the man carries them himself, they are [285] folded in baskets from one and a half to two meters long, made of bamboo stems slit lengthwise in two. These baskets are semi-cylindrical in shape and are used to carry kola nuts on the way back. A small pillow is attached to the center of the basket, and when the traveller stops to rest, he looks for a thick tree, leans one tip of the [481] basket on the crotch of two branches and the other tip on the bamboo he uses as a staff. He can thus pick up his load effortlessly when the resting period is over.

484 The traveller always returns to his village at night to avoid those prying persons who would rush out to see what he brought back. The goods are carefully put away, and on the following day the man takes up village life as though he had never left it. It is only gradually, at the evening gatherings, that he relates his adventures. At the first subsequent festivity, however, he dons his new, bright clothes and a red tarboosh, sometimes stockings and shoes, and proudly displays them. Those who have tasted /64/ the life of travel and adventure cannot do without it, and they set out again every year. Some of the independent and carefree young men even live all winter on the [178] profits of their distant journey and no longer cultivate the soil. This is shocking to the elders, who do not understand it at all but are aware that something has changed in their country.

500 Some Europeans have attempted to engage in livestock trading like the natives. One enterprising and courageous European settled in Ouahigouya, and another near Mané; a trading house sent one of its representatives to Ouagadougou, and a Syrian settled there. None of them seems to have succeeded. We are not in their confidence and cannot say just why this happened, but would it not be, at least in part, because a European cannot easily adapt himself to the native way of life? The Blacks manage to make a profit because they do not spend much along the way; they subsist on very little and carry part of the goods themselves instead of hiring porters. Also, the natives

249 It is gathered when the winter season is over. The upper tip is cut
415 horizontally to create an opening, and water is poured inside to rot the fibrous inner part. When this is accomplished, the calabash is filled with pebbles and shaken until the torn fibers are removed. Once this has been done, the binga is ready to use. When they go
● [482] on a trip, the Mossi carry it suspended from the shoulder as a drinking gourd, like all Blacks of West Africa. /483/ They use a cork of green leaves to prevent the water from escaping.

3. The green gourds properly so called (kamboudou in Mossi) which are made to grow on the roofs. The Mossi do not eat them any more than they eat the two previous species. They cut them in two and fashion them into small household calabashes.

249 Calabashes are not cultivated as a food crop, therefore, but as a crop ranking with karnyanga, cotton, tobacco, hemp, indigo, etc.

244 The Mossi also grow a kind of large cucumber, yorolé. The Gourounsi call it gango and the Bambara dié.

At the beginning of the winter season, yorolé are planted around the soukala where the household refuse is discarded. Yorolé are planted by the women. Weeds, when they come out, are cleared with the ouaka. The yorolé are harvested immediately
[252] after the millet and stored in the huts. They are cooked in water and eaten as they are, without seasoning or salt.

As for niri (the Mossi word) or yergan (the Nounouma word), it is a small gourd the size of an orange, green or yellowish green, that grows in the fields along the ground. The yergan are gathered when they are ripe, placed in a hole in the ground where they are left to rot, and then washed. Then the seeds are removed and used
[252] in the sauce, or else they are eaten roasted and seasoned with salt. One does not eat the yergan themselves, therefore, but only their seeds.

The Mossi grow them in the south, at Nobéré and Rakaye. The yergan are sown at the same time as millet, around the soukala, in the fields of maize and large red millet. They are gathered during the first half of October.

12:Skinner E-4,5 (1955-1957) 1962
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and districts were present to honor him. This being completed, the *griots* are paid, everyone rises and shouts *Ne Wardo* (the salutation at funerals), and that part of the funeral ceremony during which a man takes leave of the market community is concluded. Now his relatives, descendants and friends all return to the market, whose sights and sounds make it an integral part of the life cycle of the Mossi—the one institution of their society in which almost everyone participates actively.

Preparation for a market day, especially the tri-weekly Friday market or *Raga kasanga,* usually begins on Thursday. This day is characterized by a great deal of activity: preparing the commodities which are to be sold the next day, washing body and clothes, and combing hair. The women who prepare the beer and fried foods work late into the night preparing their wares, and a visit to the homes of the *griots* finds them preparing their drums. The little boys who go to the roadside to chant Moslem prayers to the passers-by, and the little girls who sell water to these strangers redouble their efforts until late on Thursday night to get enough money to buy presents in the market the next day. Finally, when it is quite late and the beer-making fires are out, everyone retires until the morning of the market.

At 7:00 A.M. on Friday the market is deserted except for a leper who sweeps out the stalls of the sellers in return for bits of food or presents of money. Looking at the empty stalls, one has a certain amount of difficulty imagining that this spot will be crowded with human beings five hours hence. But one is also conscious of the fact that even at this early hour scores of persons have already left their homes in distant villages and are on their way to market loaded with produce and with high hopes for the day. About 9:00 A.M. the first women arrive, balancing net-covered bundles on their heads, and take their positions in the various sections of the market with either face or back pointing to the direction from which they came. By 9:30 A.M. the butchers have arrived with their bleating sheep and goats and an aged cow. The first beer sellers have also arrived and are giving "sips" to men before they settle down to sustained drinking.

The pace of the market quickens about 10:30, and in the distance the first tap of the Bindere's drum resounds. All of a sudden, the market seems to have become a giant magnet, drawing long lines of people towards it along every path and from every direction. Women dressed in brightly colored print cloths and dresses, with babies straddling their backs and the inevitable bundles on their head, saunter into their places. Young children run ahead of their mothers or stumble behind them. Those vendors of European products who customarily transport their goods in boxes on bicycles arrive in the